

For Some the Rational Isn't Enough

WHO KILLED KENNEDY? By Thomas G. Buchanan. Map. 207 pp. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$4.95.

By HARRISON E. SALISBURY

WHEN Thomas G. Buchanan's book appeared in Paris and London last May, it created a sensation and rapidly was published in many other countries, largely in Europe but as far distant as Japan and Brazil. The reason for the interest in Mr. Buchanan's book, at bottom, was that it catered to the strong emotions aroused by President Kennedy's assassination. The melodramatic events in Dallas seemed so unreal, so tragically absurd, so incomprehensible; the official explanations seemed so incongruous and so cut across the grain of ordinary rationality as to stimulate an avid appetite for explanations more psychologically palatable.

The reaction of millions of people, particularly outside the United States, to the extraordinary chain of events—Kennedy killed; Oswald captured; Oswald killed; Ruby captured—was one of fascinated horror.

When the initial shock began to wear off, many minds rejected the simplistic explanation that the tragic succession was caused by two irrational individuals, acting separately with no connection between themselves or anyone else. In many persons there arose an almost pathological need for a more complex and elaborate explanation of the cataclysmic sequence of happenings.

A number of individuals, among them Mr. Buchanan, an American who now makes his home in Paris, stood ready to provide speculative materials out of which diverse conspiratorial and "plot" theories of the manner in which Mr. Kennedy was murdered could readily be woven. In the United States the most active exponent of a skeptical view toward all official theories and inquiries into the assassination (including that of the Warren Com-

mission) is Mark Lane, a New York attorney. Technically speaking, Mr. Lane hews to the line that he does not know how Mr. Kennedy was killed or who did it but that all versions advanced officially are suspect. He hints that even the make-up of the Warren Commission invites suspicion.

Mr. Buchanan goes much further. Not only does he reject the evidence and findings of the Warren Commission (along with the contradictory statements and assertions of investigating authorities made in the early hectic period in Dallas), but he erects his own hypothesis of what he thinks really took place. It is his theory that the President's murder was instigated by a hypothetical "Mr. X," an all-odds gambler with high stakes riding in oil and defense industries. This Mr. X, and possibly some associate X's, Y's, or Z's, felt that President Kennedy constituted a menace. He was, or so states Mr. Buchanan, not only preparing to reduce the oil depletion allowance, he was preparing to sign a disarmament pact

with Russia which would undermine and "disrupt the industries on which the plotters depended."

What did Mr. X do? He organized a conspiracy utilizing corrupt elements in the Dallas underworld and police. The assassination, Mr. Buchanan postulates, was carried out by a platoon or more of men, some uniformed, some ununiformed.

HE suggests that Oswald was a C.I.A. agent (how he became enlisted in the "plot" is by no means clear) who smuggled a weapon into the Texas Book Depository but did not actually shoot at the President. The killing, in Mr. Buchanan's account, was carried out by two other men (Accomplice One and Accomplice Two), one firing from the Depository, the other from the railroad overpass. Oswald, he contends, was supposed to be the patsy for the killing. He was to be shot "attempting to escape." Instead, Oswald shot Policeman J. D. Tippitts and landed in

jail. In their extremity, Mr. Buchanan asserts, the plotters brought in Jack Ruby to finish the job. Suffice to say that Mr. Buchanan presents no evidence of any kind to support this elaborate concoction, which Herbert L. Packer, Professor of Law at Stanford University, has labeled a "James Bond thriller."

Each uncertain link in Mr. Buchanan's tenuous chain of evidence has been specifically tested and rejected by the painstaking Warren inquiry. Mr. Buchanan has, therefore, materially revised the European edition of his book for American publication, attempting to pump new life into "Mr. X" and his mystery band.

The effort will impress few Americans. But, mischievous as it may seem to most of us, the Buchanan hypothesis, along with those of other panderers to the "plot" syndrome, can be expected to provide sinew and tissue for the Kennedy legend, which will continue to attract men's imaginations for decades to come.

Mr. Salisbury edited *The Times* edition of the *Warren Report*.

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